

The Lord here is addressing those who profess to believe in Him for salvation. He began by declaring the spiritual and eternal blessedness, character, and reward of true children of God, sinners saved, preserved, and rewarded by God's grace based on the merits of His work for them as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. Christ sends His Spirit to His people to bring them under the Gospel truth, give them spiritual life (new hearts, new spirits), and set them apart from the unbelieving world by their faith in Him and repentance of dead works and idolatry. In this capacity, collectively, they are called the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and those who are truly righteous before God in Christ.

(Matt. 5:13) - True believers, both individually and collectively as the true church of the living God are *"THE SALT OF THE EARTH."* They are made so by the sovereign grace, mercy, love, and power of God in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. We use salt as a seasoning for our food, but the main use of salt in our Lord's days on earth was as a preservative. God's children are the preservatives of this world. The reason this fallen, sinful world, and the ungodly, unbelieving people that inhabit it are kept from immediate destruction under the just wrath of God is because in each generation God has a people on this earth whom He chose before the foundation of the world and whom He intends to save and preserve unto glory. It is God's purpose to glorify Himself in the salvation of all whom Christ has redeemed by His obedience unto death on the cross. God works by His sovereign will to bring them under the Gospel and to bring them to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry (2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Pet. 3:9). Just as salt has a distinct flavor, in this way, the Lord distinguishes His people from the unbelieving world (1 John 5:19).

We see a few illustrations of this in the Old Testament. As long as Noah and his family were outside the ark, the rains did not fall, and the fountains of the deep were not opened. When he and his family were safe within the ark, however, the Lord shut them in and then released the deluge of water that swept everyone into everlasting judgment (Gen. 7:15-24). Sodom and Gomorrah were marked for destruction, but the fire of God's judgment did not devour the inhabitants until Lot was safely out of harm's way (Gen. 19:12,23-24). The winds of final judgment are held back until all the chosen, justified, and redeemed of the Lord experience the grace of God in their hearts and are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ (Rev. 7:1-3).

"But if the salt have lost his savour" - This describes mere professors of the Gospel but who do not believe it savingly as evidenced by their blending in with the lost, unregenerate world. They fail to walk in that distinction of God's grace and truth in Christ that separates them from the world. Rather than standing firm for truth so as to expose the false refuges and evil deeds of unbelievers, they consciously speak peace when there is no peace. They do this in the name of love and unity seeking to keep the peace by not upsetting the enemies of the cross. True believers are commanded by God to *"follow peace with all men,"* but not at the expense of the truth that the natural man hates - *"and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14).

(Matt. 5:14-16) - "True believers, both individually and collectively as the true church of the living God are *"THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."* We shine forth in this dark world in the light of Christ Who is the Light (John 8:12). Light is a symbol of Gospel truth that shines forth the glory of God in Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). All people by nature are in the darkness of sin, deception, ignorance, and unbelief. Christ sends forth His Spirit to bring His people to the light of the Gospel and reveal the truth so as to bring them to faith in Him and repentance of dead works. But this same light is met with opposition and even hatred by those who are left to

themselves (John 3:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:14). Christ by His Spirit must reveal Himself to His people, giving them spiritual life (spiritual hearts, eyes, and ears) to desire, hear, and see the truth of salvation by God's free and sovereign grace in Christ (Matt. 13:10-17; John 3:3-7).

The true church is "*a city that is set on an hill,*" fixed and established by the sovereign grace of God, built by and on Christ, the solid Rock (Matt. 7:24-27; 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11). The church is to be a witness of light in this world. It is not to be hidden from view like some secret society. We as the people of God are let our light shine forth that sinners might see the difference between the good works of true children of God and the evil works of unbelievers (Matt. 7:21-23; ...). The light here is not our good works. The light is the Gospel that shines forth upon our works to show that God alone, through the Lord Jesus Christ, is the source and power of all that is good, and, therefore, glorify HIM, not us (John 3:21; Php. 2:12-13). In letting our light shine, we are not seeking attention and glory for ourselves, but for Christ alone! It is our desire that people know that our only righteousness before God is the imputed righteousness of Christ and that our good works (made good as they are covered by His blood) do not contribute to our righteousness by which God justifies us.

(Matt. 5:17-20) - Because He stood against the false teachings of the scribes and Pharisees and exposed them as hypocrites leading people to eternal destruction, they accused Him of trying to destroy the law and the teaching of the prophets. But nothing could have been further from the truth. The scribes and Pharisees were the law-breakers, and they denied the teachings of the law and the prophets. The Lord Jesus Christ came to keep the law in its precept and penalty perfectly - every "jot" (smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet) and "tittle" (smallest mark in writing). He was made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, and the only way He could accomplish such a redemption was by fulfilling the righteousness of the law perfectly as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people.

The Pharisees judged themselves to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven as far as keeping the law. They were full of pride and self-righteousness claiming that they were righteous and despised others. But Christ makes it clear that as far as God's judgment and the judgment of those who are in the kingdom of heaven, those who believe in a law-works righteousness are far from great. They are the least as judged by God and His people. Christ is not saying that such people are saved and members of the kingdom of heaven but that they have a lesser position and/or reward in the kingdom. Those who seek righteousness by their law-works are lost, and if they continue in that way unto death, they shall perish (Matt. 23:13-15). The next verse proves this.

The standard of righteousness that God requires for salvation and eternal life is the perfection of the law that can only be found in Christ, the Lord our Righteousness (Rom. 10:4; 2 Cor. 5:21). The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was far below what God requires. But those who are saved by God's grace have the merits of Christ's righteousness imputed to them, and God's judgment is that "*they shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*" Their greatness is not in themselves or by their works. They are called great because they are recipients of the greatness of God's grace, mercy, and love, and they stand justified in the greatness of the righteousness of God in Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). They are great trophies of God's grace, goodness, and power. The righteousness that God has given to them was established by Christ for them in His obedience unto death (Dan. 9:24; Heb. 10:14), and this righteousness meets the standard of God's judgment (Acts 17:31). It is out of Christ's righteousness imputed to His people that the Holy Spirit gives them spiritual life, faith, and all graces and gifts of true salvation (Rom. 8:10).